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THE IDEAL COURSE IN ENGLISH FOR VOCATIONAL STUDENTS¹—(*Concluded*)

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SECOND YEAR

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

Vocational students need literature and literary study much more than classical students, since it is almost their only cultural training. Business is a waste if out of business hours we cannot enjoy the fruits of leisure, the things for which the business toil pays. Americans are too prone to forget what business is for and think it is an end in itself. If making a living is all there is to life, we'd better quit before we start. On literature almost alone in a vocational course rests the duty of enriching life, or teaching the subtle pleasures of emotion, refinement, and culture.

The business man well understands, however, that the high-school pupil who has had a liberal cultural training possesses a reserve mental force that makes him in six months outdistance the more highly trained technical business expert from the purely commercial schools. Business writing by itself tends to become too hard, and so repellent to the customer. A literary training makes the writer humanize and soften, gives little touches here and there that cannot be recognized as business, but which pull business nevertheless. An engine must have reserve—it cannot work all the time up to its capacity; a horse must have “class,” so must a dog to be worth anything. The study of literature is the thing in a high school which most helps to give human beings “class.”

The right study of literature for vocational students is not reading Scott's *Lady of the Lake* and explaining all the obscure and unusual meanings; nor is it learning the lives of authors, including the dates of their birth, marriage, and death, with a list

¹ Special report to the Permanent Committee on Standardization of Commercial Studies, Business Section, National Education Association.

of their principal works. That kind of literature teaching is obnoxious to practical human beings. It makes pupils hate masterpieces they should learn to love, and in fact defeats all the ends sought. Culture is loving the beautiful, the true, the refined. Anything that produces hate where love should be is the exact opposite of what I am talking of. It is a sinful waste in any English teaching, but especially is it a crime against vocational students.

There should be two objects for the English teaching of the second high-school year: First, creating pleasure in reading good books so that the habit of reading will be established and persisted in through life, and second, getting a command of the forms of expression in which only the literary masters are expert.

In order to accomplish the first object a most careful selection of material should be made. What are the great authors that everyone should know? What are the best parts of the best books? Great books are partly alive and vivid for us today, and partly dead and expressive of an age gone by. Too many English teachers grind on the dead parts and neglect the living; or seek pleasure for their pupils in light current literature which is too much a waste of precious moments when better books are waiting to be known. As a large number of vocational students will go out at the end of the second year, time and study should be concentrated on those authors it is a disgrace not to know about and appreciate.

First there should be study of what goes to make a good poem, a good essay, or a good novel, so the pupils will have some standards to judge by. Nothing is more important than to have standards of taste and of life. Then there should be a brief survey of the periods and history of modern literature, so as to fix the great monuments on the historical map—Shakspeare, Addison, the Victorian era, American writers, the best-known French and Russian writers. Thus we get at the start a background and a perspective. Then we begin to fill the picture in by a thorough study of a few great writers rather than a cursory study of many medium writers. We do not necessarily begin with Shakspeare because he comes first historically; but rather we consider that here we have undeveloped literary tastes, and we should begin with what they like and lead up to what they ought to like. In filling in a picture an artist never begins work at one corner and moves systematically over

the canvas. Rather he begins with a spot here that interests him most, then goes to a spot there that appeals to him, then a spot somewhere else, depending on the picture as a whole to grow out of the canvas under the magic of his hand. A teacher is an artist painting a picture on the minds of her pupils.

Lincoln is a good figure to begin with, because he is most universally admired, his life is always interesting, and his works are short and soon mastered. Next, perhaps, comes Scott in *Ivanhoe*; then perhaps Hawthorne with some of his short stories, and Dickens with *Pickwick* or *David Copperfield*, Irving with his *Rip Van Winkle* and *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Lamb with his universally interesting story-essay on roast pig, Longfellow, who as a poet needs reviewing from the grade-school study and placing with the world's poets beside Tennyson, whose simpler and shorter narrative poems may be compared with Longfellow's, Burns, the singer of love songs for all the world, and last of all Shakspeare, with his three great popular plays, *Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet* or *Julius Caesar*, and *Hamlet*. These ten or eleven great writers, made vivid and interesting personalities in the minds of pupils, with the most interesting spots in their most interesting works, have been selected because they furnish the most useful food for general conversation, and on the whole they mean most in the life and thought of our generation—they figure most largely. Each work studied should prove the entering wedge for the reading of a dozen others; and they well represent the types of literature. A library containing those works would be an excellent beginning for any boy or girl.

The works studied must be very carefully trimmed down, so that the great scenes and great moments are caught, while the lesser scenes and lesser moments are passed over by the art of judicious skipping. Vocational students above all need to learn the art of skipping, or their time for reading will prove too short and they will become discouraged and give up the habit altogether.

In addition there should be in the school library a good collection of great poems—the world's four hundred or five hundred best in a single volume, a collection of the forty best essays of the ten greatest essayists, a good collection of short stories that are

representative yet entertaining, and a collection of great orations for the oratorically inclined; and the teacher should give some time to teaching the pupils how to read and enjoy these books.

One day each week should be given to pure enjoyment of literature, under the direction of a teacher who is a real enthusiast on the subject as well as an enthusiast on leading young minds into the light—a combination that is unusual but greatly to be sought. Most of the reading can and should be done at home. The other four days in the week should be given to hard work on literary composition along lines that dovetail into the literature study.

While the object of literary study is to create love for the subject and delight in reading, it is needless to say that this does not exist in the first place in most instances and must be created by driving. Hard work of the right kind, with occasional relaxation and enjoyment to show what the hard work all is for, will be needed to give the right results.

Simple pieces representing types of masterly expression should be studied intensively and reproduced orally—translated from literary English into conversational English. This translation is the only substitute for the translation of Latin and Greek as mental discipline, and a system for making such translation a regular part of the hard work on literature is greatly needed.

The selections for translation should first of all be prose only, and simpler than most that are found in handbooks of rhetorical analysis. It is difficult to get sufficiently simple yet sufficiently typical passages. These selections should be as far as possible pure types of different forms of prose expression such as would be studied in a rhetorical handbook, only instead of talking about the form I would present the thing itself and name it afterward, or pay little attention to the machinery of names, making that machinery distinctly subordinate instead of the predominant thing as it is now in our rhetorics.

After first translating the passage into conversational English of today, I should write out the translation and perfect it, then read rapidly a corresponding essay or story of the same or a similar author, and finally write freely a parallel experience or conception

drawn from the pupil's own personal knowledge and observation, in good English of today though following the general form of the master. When my boy was in school in France the best letter he ever wrote me was a description of the first communion of the Catholic boys in the school, modeled on a similar description in the rhetorical handbook he had studied the year before. The model showed him how to bring out the high lights, to give proportion and finish, in short, to get his effect. You can't possibly teach the modeling of ideas in language except by "copying the antique" as the pupils in art do. Only by the copying and study of the good lines do you learn what good lines are. But the translation of the ancient into the modern and the conversational is the thing that saves such work from the traditional stiffness and repulsiveness from which teachers are breaking away only to go to the other extreme of complete formlessness. Form in writing and expression can be learned only by common-sense study of masterly form. Without plaster casts of Greek sculpture, and later the use of living models, art schools would be a failure; and without similar models of form, literary and linguistic study fails.

Above all the class in literature gives the only opportunity in the high-school curriculum to study the intimate, personal, emotional problems of life. This must be largely a personal matter between the teacher and the pupils, and unless teacher and pupils are friends sufficiently sympathetic and intimate, the intimacies of life become ridiculous when paraded in a class. But when the teacher and the pupils understand each other, have a measure of friendship and love for each other, the literature class can and should be made the place for thinking about the problems of our emotional life. We read novels to find out what to do when we are in love, or to enjoy the pleasure of love vicariously. When we are oppressed with a sense of loneliness and isolation, when courage fails and life looks black, we read the Bible or the great poets for consolation. A teacher of literature ought to show pupils in a class how to seek and find that consolation in books.

Then there are the problems of manners and social interchange, the secrets of social success, the problems of sex which are not physiological. At least once a month the members of the class

should take a day off and write freely, in their own style, about their own most intimate life, learning therein the limits of reserve, the secrets of delicate expression, and how really to make others understand them on matters on which too often young people are left dumb and speechless. Expression is the true relief to the emotions, and the teacher of literature, if of the right kind, can teach the art of this expression.

Without a thorough course, systematically laid out in advance, no teacher can attain the highest success in such work as has been outlined. It is not easy to make pupils work hard on emotional and aesthetic study, which seems opposed to hard work in its very nature. But there must be a great deal of hard work, coupled with a little pure enjoyment, if the great successes are to be obtained. Our English teaching undoubtedly fails very largely because of its unsystematic and random character, its lack of rational proportion and balance.

But such literary study in a vocational course lays the foundation for the true enjoyment of life, for which all work and business exist, and also creates the reserve power of thought and expression which business men find to be the best qualification for higher positions where some intangible and unnamed power of mind seems necessary. It gives the practical English work of the first year its necessary balance.

THIRD OR FOURTH YEAR

SALESMANSHIP AND ADVERTISING

The vocational pupil who remains in the high school beyond the second year is likely to stay through the four years, and before going out into business should have a second year of business English training from the higher point of view of increased knowledge of business and increased power of linguistic expression.

I have already said that a sales talk is only an oral sales letter, and an advertisement only a condensed circular. Some new elements are added, however, which constitute the technique of salesmanship and advertising. In both the great thing is not the technique, but the fundamental knowledge of human nature and how to handle it—and handling human nature successfully in adver-

tising is much harder than handling it in salesmanship, for the advertising writer does not see the men and women to whom he is talking but must depend on a power of constructive imagination which the personal salesman need not possess; and that power of imagination may be coupled with a delicacy of nature which would hamper the salesman who must buffet the world. There are about one million retail merchants in this country as against about fifty thousand manufacturers and wholesalers; and therefore retail salesmanship and retail advertising are about twenty times as important as general advertising and general salesmanship; and next to these common soliciting or canvassing is the most widely useful art.

When we come to the last year in the high school, and are ready to take up advertising and salesmanship, the study of business and of human nature and of how to handle human nature by words, pictures, talk, and writing becomes the matter of predominating interest. Only a teacher who knows by experience what business is and has done business successfully should be chosen to give this subject. A practical expert ought to be brought from the business world to handle this one subject; but it should be an educated business man or business woman, a master of English and English expression, and one able to teach. Such a combination is hard to find; but if we cannot find the ideal we must take the next best. A good teacher who will for a few years take serious interest in business on the side is probably most likely to be successful. If a business person is employed, the course must be very carefully laid out by a professional teacher, and the work supplemented by such a teacher. Too often business men do not know what the young mind needs, while it is the business of the teacher to know that. If the teachers' point of view can be corrected by the business men, the teachers probably will be the best. Business men ought to take them into their offices during the long vacations and give them the training in practical business needs which they require. If business men would do that they would perform the greatest possible service to our public schools.

This subject of advertising and salesmanship must be based on one thing, and that is the thorough study of some single business

that is within the reach of all members of the class. There is no such thing as applying the technique of these subjects in a general way. Any teacher attempting to build character, and lecture on business psychology, and illustrate applied art, etc., without first taking up the serious study of *a business* and the needs of that business, is merely slopping around and largely wasting the time of the class.

Since it is practically certain in most of our commercial schools that the majority of the pupils are going into retail businesses, the study of a typical retail business is the first requisite.

The grocery business is probably the most universally accessible, and I should begin with that, first studying carefully the principal objects that are sold, and then alternating little talks about them by pupils as retail salesmen in a shop, with letters answering the same inquiries when they come through the mail. A few weeks of plain retail talking and letter writing, with attention mainly concentrated on the study of the goods and study of the minds of the customers, will mean beginning the subject where it really ought to begin; and there will be little opportunity for any pseudo-science of salesmanship or pseudo-scientific advertising. The high school is no place for pseudo-sciences. It is a place for practical training and the development of practical skill. There is no science of salesmanship, and there is no science of advertising—scarcely the beginnings of a science in either; but there is a very well developed art of salesmanship, and a very well developed art of retail advertising. The art of general advertising is still extremely uncertain. Both are founded on the simple talk of retail clerks showing and describing goods, and the letters of correspondents doing the same thing. Salesmanship is just eager, enthusiastic conversation adapted to the special character of the customer. Knowing the customer and being able to talk well is about all there is to it.

Advertising is the writing of letters that will do what the talk of the salesman does, circulars and catalogues of the same kind, and newspaper catalogue descriptions. The French department stores publish rather good-looking pamphlet catalogues and send them once a month to their patrons (not their mail-order patrons

only, but all their retail customers), while American department stores publish their catalogues daily or weekly in the newspapers, because they can get them circulated through the second-class mail. That is the situation about advertising in a nutshell. The higher type of magazine display advertising, carried on by about six hundred large manufacturers, has quite largely monopolized the attention of teachers, but is practically important in high-school teaching in the proportion of six hundred to a million (the number of retail dealers who must sell and advertise in order to live).

Department-store advertising is about the same thing, whether done by handbill circulars distributed from house to house or published in the newspapers. The technique of this advertising is the technique of printing. Printing is so universal that it ought to be taught in all our schools. Commercial pupils ought to know what type is, its characteristics, the principles of its display; what paper is and how it may be used artistically; and the economics of printing so as not to waste money on it. At present there can be little doubt that 25 per cent of the expenditure on printing is wasted for lack of knowledge, on the part of those who buy printing, of how they can get, economically, the results they want. A class in advertising should learn the technique of printing, and something about the principles of applied art in type and picture arrangement for commercial purposes. Advertising is probably studied best in connection with dry-goods or department-store business.

Finally comes the sustained sales talk. Here endurance is the principal requirement, and an extraordinary acquaintance with the subject is required to enable a person to talk by the hour without becoming a bore. The true art of salesmanship is to talk by the hour without becoming tiresome. I myself cannot think of any way in which a pupil may be supplied with a subject he can know so thoroughly as that, unless he is taught to sell a practical book he has become thoroughly familiar with by study of it for several months in school. Then it is easier to get a job as a book agent than as any other kind of specialty salesman. Next to drill on selling a book I would suggest drill on selling an office appliance such as a typewriter.

SUMMARY

First semester: Review of grammar and punctuation, practical rhetorical criticism, and social letter or report writing once a week, with spelling every day taught by a regular English teacher, familiarity with business not required.

Second semester: Business correspondence, taught by a good practical teacher who has had experience in business or who has made a specialty of business principles and practical business requirements.

Third and fourth semesters (second year): English literature and composition, taught by an enthusiastic literature teacher who understands how to make pupils "trot before" (as the French say).

Fourth year: sales correspondence, retail salesmanship, retail advertising, and printing, taught by a business expert under the supervision of a liberal-minded head teacher of English, who will go into the class at least once a week and supplement the work.

The third year may be given to local requirements and special methods. It will be the teacher's free year to take up such things as he or she can teach best, including current literature, drama, technical writing, etc. Most of these subjects cannot be taught successfully unless there is a teacher in the school who has made a personal specialty of them; and it is always well worth while to give such a teacher an opportunity. When a teacher with brains is thoroughly enthusiastic about a subject or a method, he is likely to make it a supremely important course for any or every pupil to take. The inspiration of enthusiastic teachers should never be missed. This does not mean, however, that teachers who are not enthusiastic or masters of a special subject should be permitted to follow their own meandering wills. When teachers are good, bad, and indifferent, and average about the same as other human nature, regular results will come only from pretty rigid courses pretty carefully supervised by principals who are supposed to be superior to their subordinates.